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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 006757

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S VERBAL MESSAGE TO THE SECRETARY ON PEACE PROCESS

SIPDIS

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) The DCM was convoked to the Foreign Ministry September 1 by newly arrived MFA Chef du Cabinet, Ambassador Wafaa Bassim (D equivalent), to receive a verbal message to the Secretary (text at paragraph three) regarding steps Egypt believes Washington should take with respect to the Middle East peace process.

2. (C) The GOE "verbal message" urged the USG and other Quartet members to pay particular attention to the need for progress on "interim measures" to ensure that the momentum resulting from the Israel withdrawal from Gaza is maintained. Wafaa, who was accompanied by the MFA's new Middle East Affairs Cabinet staffer responsible for the peace process, Ezzedine Shukry, suggested that any "setbacks" in the West Bank, particularly expansion of settlements or continued work by the Israelis on the security wall, would "feed Hamas extremism." Wafaa urged additional "confidence building measures" to help efforts by moderates from both sides. She suggested that the Quartet should note the significance of Gaza disengagement, but at the same time emphasize the need for additional progress on the Roadmap to address final status issues.

3. (C) The DCM agreed to relay Wafaa's points to Washington, observed that it was helpful to have this information well in advance of the Quartet meeting in New York, and noted that while we agree on the need for additional progress with Roadmap implementation, it is crucial that Palestinian control of Gaza succeed. The DCM noted the need for progress on various secondary issues in Gaza, like disposition of rubble issue, security, and border crossings. Palestinian difficulties in Gaza would provide a pretext for those opposed to peace. Responding, Bassim said that President Mubarak had sent Intelligence Chief Soliman to Gaza and Israel for this reason, where Soliman held 42 (sic) meetings on this topic.

4. (SBU) MFA Verbal Message to the Secretary on Peace Process:

Begin Text:

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Northern West Bank is a historic step in many ways. This is why Egypt has lent it its support, and continues to do so. The determination and resolve with which the Israeli government has implemented its plan demonstrate its ability to face the settlers and their narrow-minded agenda and to take courageous steps when it serves the interests of Israel as a state. The Israeli government deserves praise for this.

What is critically needed now is to take immediate measures in order to build on the withdrawal, to make it a stepping-stone towards a sustainable peace process. Inaction, waiting for elections, would help extremist elements in both societies to play on entrenched fears, which could lead to a new round of violence. The Israeli public is told that its security was undermined and the Palestinians are told that the Gaza withdrawal was a smoke screen for further settlement and Barrier construction. Hamas tell them that Israel withdraws only in response to violence. With the tight closure in the West Bank, which exacerbates frustration, the situation can easily slip into another round of violence. This, in turn, would be presented to the Israeli public as the ultimate proof of the futility of peaceful measures, leading to more intransigence and extreme results in the elections.

Positive action now can prevent this cycle from taking place. Although a quick resumption of final status talks is the best way out, we do understand that it is unlikely. However, between the 'waiting strategy' and the resumption of final status talks, there is a room for action. A number of measures can stabilize the situation, create a positive atmosphere, and allow the parties to navigate safely through the elections season. This would be the best preparation for full implementation of the Road Map, including final status talks, after the elections.

These measures would focus on the two most sensitive areas: security for Israelis and land for Palestinians. Without a Palestinian demonstrable action on security, it will be difficult for the Israeli government to take positive measures. Without Israeli demonstrable action on settlement and Barrier construction as well as on prisoners and closure, it will be difficult for Abu Mazen to take effective measures to address the chaotic security situation, control armament, establish PA control over its territory and prevent attacks against Israelis. Only mutual and simultaneous action can work. Egypt is already engaged in discussions with both parties in order to convince them to take simultaneous steps in these two areas, and your active support is needed. Your intervention with the parties would assist our effort and will signal to the parties that the international community is united in its position.

It is also important that we seize the opportunity of the next Quartet Principals Meeting in New York to redress the peace process and put it back on track. Three main tasks lend themselves for a quick international intervention. First is the clear support for the completion of the Israeli withdrawal and the resolution of its consequent issues. Second is to urge the parties to face their most compelling obligations now "security and land" and to take effective measures to rebuild confidence in the negotiation process. Third, is to re-insert the Israeli withdrawal into the wider peace process. This could be done through setting a realist date for the resumption of final status talks. It could also be supported if the quartet is to spell out the parameters for final status issues, on which there is consensus in the international community. This would help frame and focus the debate, and prepare the parties to address these issues when negotiations resume. Egypt stands ready to assist in such an effort, and I am personally looking forward to discuss these issues with you in New York.

End text.

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